The Chair Project

Image + Text

Crafting the Vision
Term III 2020

Elmira College
Elmra, NY 14901

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The Artists

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The Inspiration and Assignment

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19 James McNeill Whistler
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Cover: James McNeill Whistler

The Assignment

You see them on porches and on lawns
down by the lakeside,
usually arranged in pairs implying a couple
who might sit there and look out
at the water or the big shade trees.
The trouble is you never see anyone
sitting in these forlorn chairs

excerpt from **The Chairs That No One Sits In** by Billy Collins

Using your photo, drawing or other artwork from the "Image of a Chair" assignment, write a poem, anecdote or short story about the chair. Consider the actual chair first: what color? material? what room is it in? old? metal? upholstered? Is it a chair you like? Does it remind you of someone? Do you associate an event with this chair? Do you dislike the chair? Why? What would you write if you had to give a definition of the word "chair"? Were you influenced by the art you viewed (J.M.Whistler, Vincent van Gogh, Joseph Kosuth) or the literature your read (Billy Collins, Ezra Jack Keats)? We will present the text and image as a single expression of art.

More Than A Chair

A chair is meant to be sat on
but we find other uses for them,
like a step stool for reaching the highest shelf,
or a support system for building forts in the living room.

A chair is meant to be sat on
but sometimes we fidget in our seats
and loosen the screws that hold the chair together
and the chair becomes an extra surface to store old papers.

A chair is meant to be sat on
although occasionally it is flipped upsidedown
and used as a shield against nerf gun darts
flying from the other side of the room.

A chair is meant to be sat on;
by family members at the dinner table,
by visiting friends at brunch,
by busy students doing their homework,

A chair is meant to be sat on
by parents who need to have a serious
discussion with their children
about not doing enough work around the house.

A chair is meant to be sat on
and then pushed in politely
after an awkward dinner table conversation
that we couldn't wait to escape.

A chair is meant to be sat on;
maybe not long enough to last 16 years
since the set was first purchased
but a wobbly chair is still a chair.

A chair is meant to be sat on
and we never realized how much
that chair has seen.
of our messy play sessions

our wiggling toes trying to get comfortable
as we study for tomorrow's exam.
I guess a chair is just a chair in the end.
But it's more than that, really.

Kaitlin Duffy'23

Nanny

The Chair
Green like your eyes
Soft like your touch
Comfortable like your arms
Sturdy like your spirit
And now the empty chair haunts me
The laughs
The tears
The endless stories you would tell
You'd spell out the world to me
The chair was there holding you and me
As you rocked me to sleep
And dried my tears
The chair held us
And you held me
And the chair just holds me
And when I need your guidance
The chair is there to hold me
Knowing you are holding me

Zoe Smith'23

The Chair

This black lonely chair
is the one my dad would bring
to little league baseball games.

He would sit all alone.

Away from all
the other parents
so he wouldn't be bothered.

All so he could just
focus
on the games

Mason Ryan'22

Grandma's Favorite Chair

When Grandma used to sit in her favorite chair
She would complete her crosswords in her favorite chair
Every morning she would drink her tea in her favorite chair
Oh how she loved her favorite chair
But now that she is gone from her favorite chair
There will forever be an empty space in her favorite chair
That chair will remain in its place as grandma's favorite chair

Sydney Coffin'22

EMERGENCY
Waiting rooms full of chairs.
URGENT
Waiting for care.
HOSPITAL
Most of the time full of family and loved ones,
UNCOMFORTABLE
anxious for news.

BLOOD
The fluid we sometimes fear.
NEEDLES
Collecting the fluid for an answer.
TESTS
The answers collected from samples given by the laboratory
LAB TECHNICIANS
The scientists that determine our health

BEIGE
The same neutral colored plastic chairs.
EMOTION
Sometimes grey, and sometimes blue.
SPACE
Sometimes built for single people, or sometimes doubles.
SICKNESS
Patients sit and wait in the same chairs.

The same chairs even in different hospitals all over the world.
The same chairs in different parts of the hospital or doctors' offices.

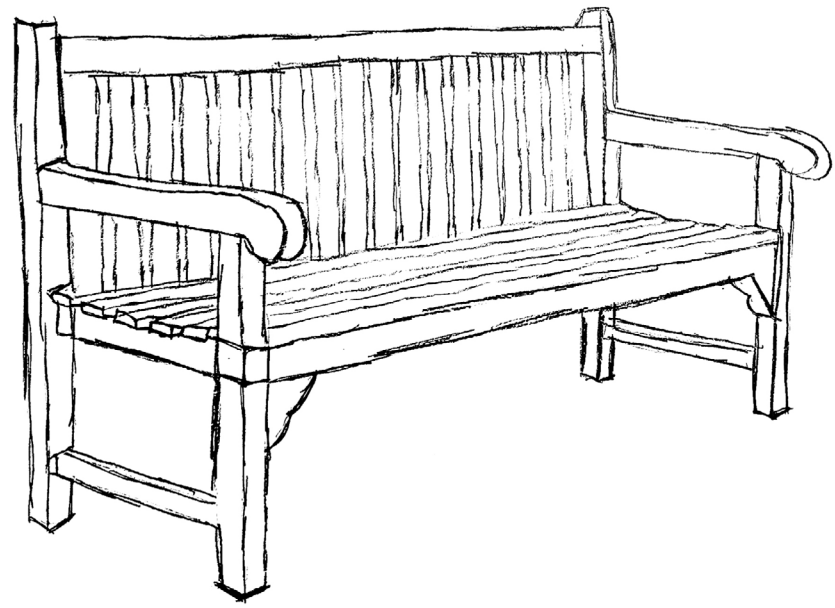
We all wait in the same chairs in hospital rooms, emergency rooms, and clinics,
LONG DAY
all anxious for news.

Or waiting to be called on.
APPOINTMENT

Even when they are uncomfortable,
BAD DAY
We sit for minutes, sometimes hours and wait.
PATIENT
Even if we do not have to sit in those uncomfortable chairs,
HARD
we sit willingly to be with our loved ones.

All feeling the same emotions,
ANXIETY, HOPE, PAIN or HAPPINESS.
One chair, supporting numerous individuals throughout their
LIVES.

Sabrina Lounsavang'22



A brown bench
Wooden with a silver plaque
So simple yet so pure
Sits under rain or shine,
Embracing many people, even loved ones

This bench sees so much,
Tears, joys, laughs, and sunshine.
Surrounded by flowers and butterflies
Even many powerful and great souls

You would never know
How much of an impact
Or meaning that it has in this world
Crazy that there is so much unknown

"Don't count the days, make the days count -KPM"
Something people should keep in mind
If given the chance to sit on this simple bench.

Life is sometimes taken from us
When we least expect it.
Young souls who inspired so many.
Oftentimes, people create memorials.

Memorials that are much more than a burying place
Or somones forever home
Rather a place to visit, make peace, and enjoy time that was lost.
The quote hits close to home for some.

Kate Phalon McCarthy
Beautiful soul taken from this world
Far too young
With the memories and smiles that are left

We were left with this brown wooden bench.
I find myself there often
A place where I love to go
Sharing peace and love with my friends
A place that is peaceful, and beautiful
Brown wooden bench
Looks so normal but holds so much.

Emma Crocker'21

A comfortable support system
A friend to lean into when tired
Manages to be at everyone's bonfire
The chair that is the choice of the summer
Grab a blanket, some smores
Sit back
Relax

Your toes meshing into the green grass
You lean back and look up to see the
stars, or the bright blue sky
The sun beats down on the brown smooth
arms of the chair
Making images out of the spying animal
clouds rolling by
Pick up, and move to the next spot
Relax.

Alexis Dinga'22

The Chair in the Back

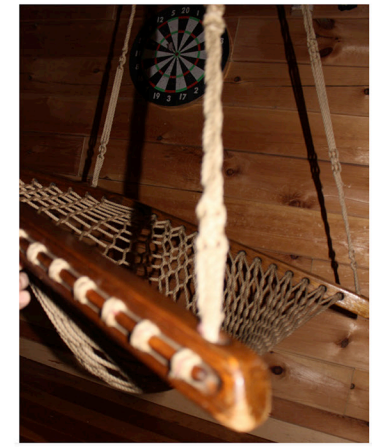
The big chair in the back of my grandparents' living room
has always meant love since I was little
where I found out I was about to go see my baby sister,
where my grandfather and I would read books and take naps
and most of all where I heard stories of my grandfather's life
over the years the chair may have changed
from a comfy green chair to the comfy tan chair,
but it is still so much more than a place to sit:
it's my childhood spent with my grandfather
and all the love we have for each other.

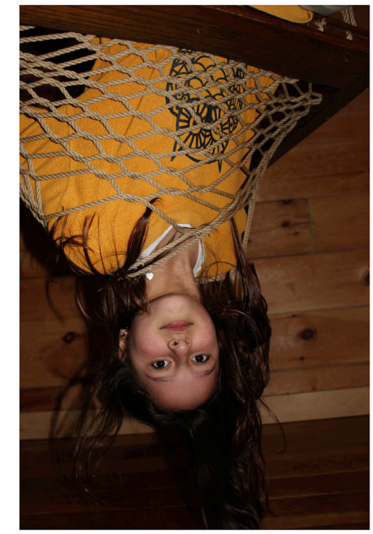
Hannah Whittier '23

The Swing Chair

This ongoing family keepsake has been a special piece of furniture for all of the children in the family. Between all the minor injuries, the memories, giggles, and smiles, this simple yet different chair has turned into something so much more.

Beginning when their father was just a child, (probably ten years old) this chair had come into his life and had never left. Although the chair has now been overused, and almost 30 years old, the feeling that follows each swing is still powerful and special. Now passed on to his eight kids, each and every one of them has something special to say about this silly little chair…





Nick: I remember each and every one of us having tons of fun and spinning each other until we got sick

Francesca: Now looking back at what we did with that swing as kids was so fun but considering my own daughter on that swing doing the same things is a frightening thought. But I also want her to experience all that we did as kids

Paul: My entire childhood with that swing was filled with black eyes and fun. We would swing from 10 feet in the air and throw things at each other. It is a time that I will never forget

Lucas: My favorite place that the swing was, was in the barn where we were able to swing super high. We would be there for hours.

Matthew: I remember one time I was swinging on the chair and my friend threw a dart and it landed in the rim of my hat

Isabel: When I think of a swing chair I think of us as little kids and being in it all the time. It was one of our favorite chairs of all time and still is.

Nina: It seems to be the first place any of us go when we first get to the cabin. Me and my brother especially will always run to the swing and jump on it.

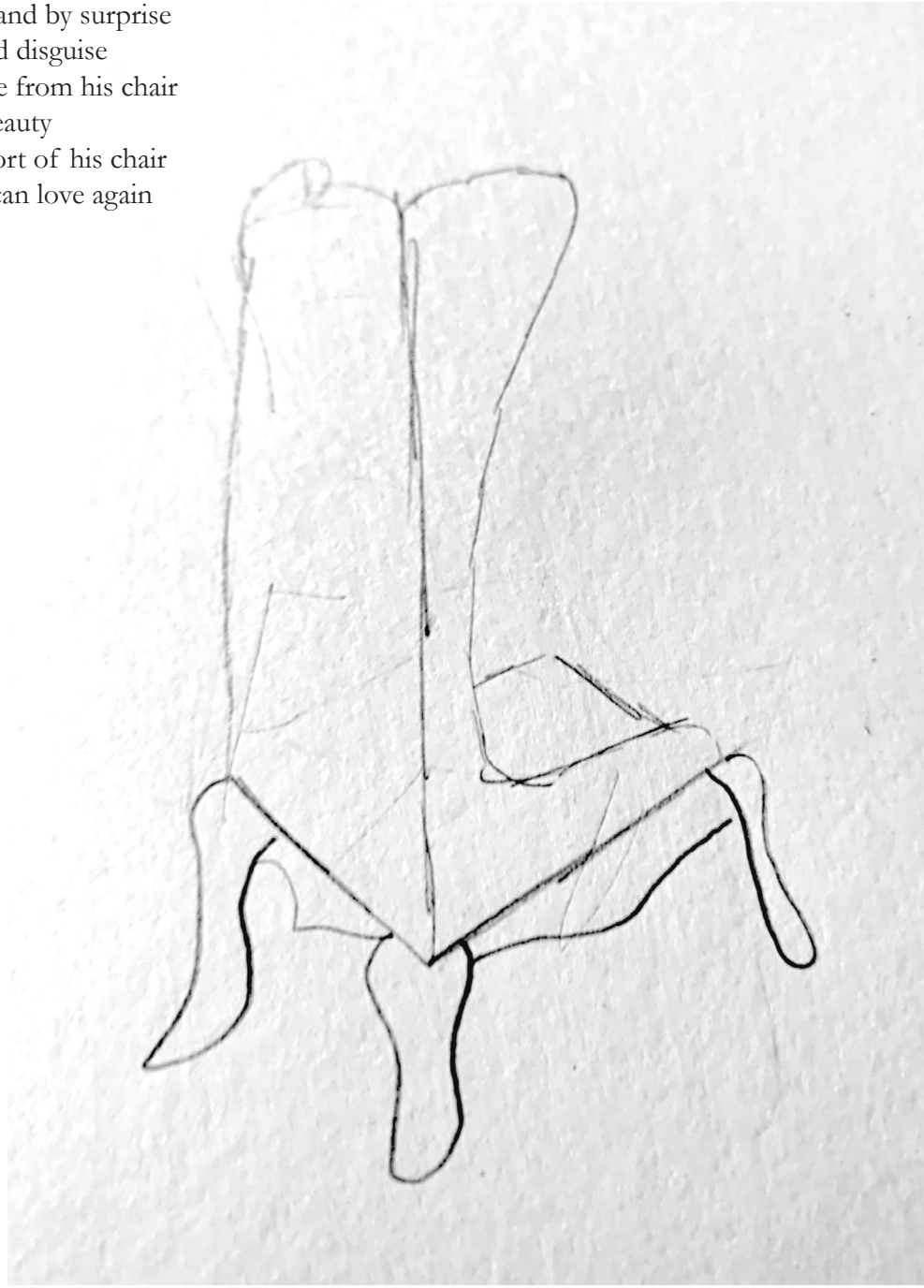
Dan: I love playing on the chair and spinning on it. I always wonder what the chair was like when my older siblings were my age and what they used to do.

Beyond the 30 years of memories, the mother who never got to experience the chair during her childhood is still very fond of the swing. This is because of the sentimental value that came with it. She has brought it through every house they have lived in and with each of her eight children; there is a fond memory to go with it. She claims, "I have a picture of each one of my children in that chair, and I make it a point to take pictures of them whenever I can." she goes on to say, "the best part is my grandchildren will also get to experience the joy and laughter when on this chair." There is something so very special about this chair that is indescribable.

Taylor Keane'23

The lonely man sorrows
Lost in the darkness with no hope
His anger drives him to his despair
Longing in his chair
He wallows into the comfort of his loneliness
One day, he comes across a woman
That sparked hope in his eyes
She saw his flaws and by surprise
He slowly dropped disguise
Every day he arose from his chair
To seek out her beauty
Leaving the comfort of his chair
To shed hope he can love again

Jenny Heath'22



A man's chair is more than just a chair
It defines a man
His style
His admiration
His companionship
His drive
His taste
His future
The comfort of a man's chair speaks volumes
A man without his chair
Is a man without himself?

Zachary Ronan'22

The Papasan Chair

The most comfortable chair
Best when curling up to read a book
Its large, round, bowl-shape cushions from every angle
Leaving a sense of relaxation

Numerous pillows and blankets are best on a cold winter's night
Drinking hot cocoa at the highest angle of the papasan
Changing the angle once again to nestle in cozy comfort
Drifting off to sleep in the snug and secure chair

Some of the best things in life are cheap
The papasan chair is no execption
The neutral colored cushions match almost every home
Giving a warm welcoming environment

Hailey Erway'23

"Are you serious? These are not dining room chairs?"

Says who? Who made those rules?

"These are not a practical purchase".

I know, I am not a practical person…

Move them into the dining room.

(we never use the dining room. I am not a practical person).

I've always enjoyed a bold statement. Look at me. Here I am.

This chair is a statement.

Barely there while being so loud.

Do you notice it?

Everyone loves this chair. Or they do not understand it, they do not like it. There is no inbetween.

I enjoy that. Cut and dry. No guessing.

"How much do they hold?" he asked… wondering, will they support his weight? Our families' weight??

They do. They are surprisingly strong.

Beauty and function. I've always been drawn to that. Two birds, two really big stones.

Barely there. And so LOUD.

See me. And look right through me. At the same time.

It is like staring at a painting, or into the forest. You look closely, intently, taking every inch in. And then you stop, your gaze gives out and your eyes lose focus. That is when the magic happens.

The subject of your attention and the environment around it become one. Melting together into magic.

I am (they are, we are) beautiful alone. But fill us up, put substance, love and life inside us and look again. Let your eyes lose focus…

Beauty. Function.

There are two ways to approach these chairs; with caution, or with curiosity.

Will they hold you?

or

Are you brave enough to find out?

Heather Maio'22

Vincent van Gogh's *Chair*, 1888
National Gallery, London
Wikimedia Commons Public Domain Image

J. M. Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1[N 1],* 1871
Alternative titles: *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*; *Whistler's Mother*
Museo de Orsay, Paris
Wikimedia Commons Public Domain Image

chair (chãr), n. [OF. chaiere (F. chaire), < L. cathedra: see cathedra.] A seat with a back, and often arms, usually for one person; a seat of office or authority, or the office itself; the person occupying the seat or office, esp. the chairman of a meeting; a sedan-chair; a chalet; a metal block or clutch to support and secure a rail in a railroad.

Joseph Kosuth
American, born 1945

One and Three Chairs 1965
Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and photographic enlargement of a dictionary definition of "chair"

Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund, 1978

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Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs,* 1965
MoMA, NYC
Installation Photo by Jan Kather